

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

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SUBJECT: PAKISTANI MEDIA COVERAGE OF BHUTTO VISIT

REFERENCE: STATE 29380

1. USIS CURRENT REACTION REPORTS FOR FEB 5, 6, 7, AND 8 BEING REPEATED SEPTELS IN LIGHT POSSIBILITY THEY MAY NOT HAVE BEEN GIVEN TIMELY DISTRIBUTION TO DEPARTMENT.

2. IN HEAVY MEDIA COVERAGE OF BHUTTO VISIT, QUESTION OF ENDING ARMS EMBARGO HAS RECEIVED MAJOR ATTENTION . PRESS GENERALLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR LIFTING OF BAN. PRESS ITEMS INCLUDE: GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PAKISTAN TIMES FEB 7 HEADLINE "PAKISTAN SEEKS ONLY DEFENSIVE WEAPONS"; BHUTTO QUOTE THAT PAKISTAN NEEDS ANTI-TANK AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILE SYSTEM; NEW TIMES HEADLINE FEB 7 "US AGREES TO LIFT EMBARGO?"; PAK TIMES FEB 8 ITEM (BHUTTO) "HAS ACHIEVED WINNING NEW CONSIDERATION ON LIFTING ARMS EMBARGO"; AND REPEAT OF ITEM FROM WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL, "IF BHUTTO IS CHARMING AT CONFERENCE TABLE. . . HE JUST MIGHT GET ALL DEFENSIVE WEAPONS HE IS SEEKING."

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3. EMBASSY CONSIDERS AS IMPORTANT FEB 7 PAK TIMES FRONT PAGE ARTICLE BY H.K. BURKI, PAKISTAN'S LEADING DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT, WHO STATES THAT BHUTTO HAS MADE STRONG CASE FOR LIFTING ARMS EMBARGO. ACCORDING TO BURKI, "THERE ARE NOW STRONG INDICATIONS THAT THE FORD ADMINISTRATION IS SYMPATHETIC TO THE REMOVAL OF THE TEN-YEAR OLD EMBARGO. HOWEVER, IT DATE NOT MAKE ANY FORMAL COMMITMENT UNTIL IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE PREDOMINANTLY DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS WILL NOT SHOOT DOWN ITS DECISION." EMBASSY ASSUMES THAT THIS PROBABLY TAKEN FROM DEEP BACKGROUND BRIEFING GIVEN BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON. THIS IS ONLY COMMENT IN PRESS WE HAVE FOUND SO FAR IN REPORTS FILED BY PAK CORRESPONDENTS WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN BASED ON BRIEFING.

4. ARTICLE CONTINUES, "PRIME MINISTER, OBVIOUSLY CONSCIOUS OF CRUCIAL NATURE OF THE ROLE OF CONGRESS, HAD SESSION WITH HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE THIS MORNING. AFTER HIS TALKS WITH FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE YESTERDAY DESCRIBED AS GOOD, BHUTTO HAS MADE A STRONG CASE FOR LIFTING THE EMBARGO." DEFENSE SECRETARY SCHLESINGER AND VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER, IN BURKI ARTICLE, ARE DESCRIBED AS BOTH KNOWN TO BE FAVORABLY INCLINED TO LIFTING EMBARGO.

5. DURING BHUTTO-FORD MEETING, ACCORDING TO BURKI, HALF OF TIME SPENT ON EXCHANGES ON ARMS EMBARGO. HOWEVER, PAIR ALSO DISCUSSED SITUATION IN THE SUBCONTINENT, INCLUDING IMPLICATIONS OF EXPECTED AGREEMENT BETWEEN GOI AND SHEIK ABDULLAH ON KASHMIR AND ALSO INDIAN NUCLEAR AMBITIONS. IN ADDITION, AMERICAN PEACE-MAKING EFFORTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST WERE REVIEWED.

6. IN PRESS COVERAGE HERE PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR INTENTIONS LINKED TO RESUMPTION OF ARMS SUPPLY, PAK TIMES FEB 7 REPORTING BHUTTO FEB 6 PRESS CONFERENCE QUOTES HIM AS SAYING, "NUCLEAR PROGRAM, WHILE INTENDED FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES, IS SUBJECT FOR REVIEW AND RECONSIDERATION. FUTURE INTENTIONS DEPEND ON THE KINDS OF DECISIONS TAKEN HERE (DURING VISIT TO US)." "PAKISTAN NOT IN POSITION TO SIGN NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY IN ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE SAFEGUARDS LIKE THOSE OF UN."

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7. AT CONCLUSION OF BHUTTO WASHINGTON VISIT, PAK TIMES FEB 8 REPORTS, "IT MAY BE TOO SOON TO MAKE PROPER ASSESSMENT OF BHUTTO'S EFFORTS TO SOFTEN CONGRESSIONAL OPPOSITION TO LIFTING ARMS EMBARGO. A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION INDICATES THAT, WHILE SOME OF THE LEADERS OF CONGRESS ARE NOW SYMPATHETIC TO PAKISTAN'S CASE, OTHERS CONTINUE, FOR VARIOUS REASONS, TO MAINTAIN THEIR HOSTILITY."
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